

A Freehand Talk about the Stage and Stage Folk

by
Matthew
White, Jr.



Eleanor Robson, as
"Merely Mary Ann" in
the play of
that name



Jessie
Busley
who
has
the
leading
part
in
"Little
Mary"



Austin
Tarnum
as
the
"Virginian"



Scene from the
second act of
"The Virginian"
where the leader
pleads with Molly
to answer the all im-
portant question he has
put to her.



Chauncey Olcott,
starring in
"Terence"



Henry E.
Dixey with
an important
part in "Little
Mary"



Edwin Arden, who is Lancelot
the composer, in
"Merely Mary Ann"

New York, Jan. 16.
"SHE looks much prettier as the
maid than she does as the
lady."

This was the remark of the
person who accompanied me to "Merely
Mary Ann," and was in reference to
Eleanor Robson. The matter of looks
aside, I have never liked Miss Robson
as well as in this play of Israel Zang-
will, whose last venture on this side
the water was the luckless "Children of
the Ghetto."

After a short term here that piece was
taken to London and failed there as
completely as in New York. This was
all of five years ago, and the success of
the comedy "Merely Mary Ann" shows
that the Americans have decided to for-
get and forgive.

Still, I heard a woman behind me re-
mark the other night it would be quite
impossible to sit through the play with
any other than Eleanor Robson for the
leading character. The work is certainly
discursive; every once in a while Mr.
Zangwill impresses you with the fact
that he is ventilating some pet theory
of his own rather than getting on with
his story. Shaw knows how to do this,
so does Ibsen, both of them deftly, but
neither Zangwill nor William Dean
Howells is master of the art of being a
craft without letting other folk find it
out.

By the way, I wonder if Mr. Zangwill
is aware of the fact that "Robin Hood"
was called "Maid Marian" in England,
and that its sequel here bears that name.
This is what he named the opera sup-
posed to be written by the composer,
Lancelot, his leading male character,

played very neatly by Edwin Arden,
who must rejoice to have escaped from
the locomotive-horn-book atmosphere
of "The Ninety and Nine," which fell
to his lot last season.

He is the man whom Julia Arthur
felled with a hunting crop and then
pushed under the sofa in "A Lady of
Quality." He is a Virginian by birth,
and when he was a juvenile acted in
the support of Edwin Booth at the Bos-
ton Museum. He toured for six years
in his own play, "Eagle's Nest," and
then joined William H. Crane's com-
pany for "The Governor of Kentucky"
and "The Fool of Fortune."

Eleanor Robson's Career.

Eleanor Robson's career is now pretty
well known to theatergoers. She was
never heard of until "Arizona" was pro-
duced in New York, after making a hit
elsewhere for almost twelve months.
This was some five years ago, and her
Bonita became the talk of the town.
She next appeared as Flossie Williams
in that peculiar play, which had a brief
run at the Savoy—"Unleavened Bread"—
and the next season became leading
woman to Kyrie Bellew in "A Gentle-
man of France."

Last season she contended against
heavy odds in "Audrey," and in the
spring failed to set the Hudson afire
with her Juliet. But her "Merely Mary
Ann" atones for much, and the manner
in which the play was received by the
critics must be a source of infinite satis-
faction to Mr. Zangwill, who stirred up
a veritable hornet's nest with his
"Ghetto." Both he and the Liebler
Company so resented the comments of
the reviewers that Mr. Zangwill issued

an open letter to Clement Scott (then
writing for the "Herald"), in which he
threatened to sue for libel any person
who should state that the play had
been rewritten by James A. Herne.

The Liebler Company, in their turn,
advised the piece as follows: "Notice:
Notwithstanding the concerted and de-
liberate attempt on the part of a coterie
of so-called dramatic critics, in an at-
tack of unparalleled virulence and men-
dacity, to convert the hitherto unequal-
led success of the Zangwill play into a
failure, the management desire to state
that the production is playing at the
Herald Square Theater to practically
the capacity of the house; that it will
continue to play there indefinitely."

"The disgusting injustice of this at-
tack upon Mr. Zangwill and his play is
shown in the fact that no drama pre-
sented in recent years ever received
such enthusiastic, emphatic, and unani-
mous praise as the Zangwill play re-
ceived at the hands of the press of Phil-
adelphia, Baltimore, and Washington."
As a matter of fact the "indefinite"
run was from October 15 to November
26, when the Jewish piece gave place
to the London musical comedy (which
failed in its turn), "A Greek Slave," in-
troducing to New York the clever play-
er, Minnie Ashley, who married the
other day and retired.

A "Stomach" Play.

If the answer to "How is Your Little
Mary?" can bring no cheerier response
from individuals who know its meaning
than must come these days from the box
office of the Empire Theater, then is the
health of the nation in a bad way. For
whatever London has done in the way of
receiving with open arms this latest
work of J. M. Barrie, and, however
great may be the hit of his other fan-
tastic comedy now on view here, with
William Gillette as its chief exponent,
certain it is New Yorkers do not take
kindly to this play.

It is not disgusting in the least—only
tedious—than which nothing worse can
be said of it from the point of drawing
capacity.

You see, the trouble lies right here. In
England one is not supposed to mention
that very necessary organ for the di-
gestion of one's food, so that a play

written around it has all the audacious
charm of forbidden fruit. In this coun-
try we are not so squeamish, provided
we use the correct word, so that the
piece must fall back on its inherent
dramatic qualities, and these being prac-
tically nil, I was not surprised to count
only eight people in the balcony of the
Empire the other night.

The cast was all right, too. Jessie
Busley makes an admirable Moira,
the granddaughter of the Irish chemist,
who, in his great love for the English
people, tries to put them on a diet for
their stomach's sake. Miss Busley was
seen here last in "The Girl With the
Green Eyes," taking Mrs. McKee Ran-
kin's place in a part that Mr. Fitch es-
pecially rewrote for her. Previous to
that she was with James Lee Flinn, in
that hapless English farce, "The
New Clown."

Her first New York hit was made in
1896 as the boy Pan Pan in "Two Lit-
tle Vagrants," at the Academy of Mus-
ic. She scored as the music hall "ar-
tist" at the Garden in another English
melodrama, "Hearts Are Trumps."

I went on the stage, Miss Busley
wrote me some time since, "in 1899, be-
ginning with Robert Mantell, and played
about every part in his repertoire, even
Deadmona—with the assistance of a
pair of high heels."

A Topsy-Turvy Season.

As an indication of the topsy-turvy
condition into which this remarkable
theatrical season has thrown the troupe
acting in "Little Mary" is not the
Empire stock. In fact, that organiza-
tion seems to exist no longer, except
in some of its members now doing one-
night stands in support of Fay Davis
and "Whitewashing Julia." This is the
first winter since the opening of the
theater in 1893 that the Charles Froh-
man company, whose home it is sup-
posed to be, has not been playing at
the house in January.

"Little Mary's" cast is headed by
Henry E. Dixey, who was last seen in
town in "Facing the Music," the farce
that made quite a hit late in the spring
at the Garrick. Happily, Mr. Dixey is be-
ginning to live down his "Adonis" repu-
tation, not that there was anything to
be ashamed of in being able to play the
title role in a burlesque for 200 consecu-

tive nights in New York, but the public
came to call him "Dixey Adonis" and to
take it for granted that he could do
nothing else as well. In fact, "The Seven
Ages," his successor, failed miserably.

After that Dixey was engaged for the
stock company at Daly's, and pleased
the critics with his Malvolio in "Twelfth
Night." In connection with his Daly
experiences, I find in a "Dramatic Mir-
ror" of 1896 that Dixey claims to have
been the first Svengali.

"I introduced a little Trilby burlesque,
where Miss Rehan was hypnotized into
singing 'Ben Bolt.' Afterward I went to
Augustin Daly and proposed that he
should dramatize 'Trilby,' have Miss
Rehan play the character and let me do
Svengali. But he pooh-poohed me and
wouldn't listen to the idea. Instead he
put on 'A Bundle of Lies,' where I had
a fifteen-line part. The play was a fear-
ful frost."

But Dixey had a fine opportunity some
four years ago, when he played David
Garrick in Stuart Robson's production
of "Oliver Goldsmith." After that he
went to London and appeared in "The
Whirl of the Town," a Casino review
that failed to win out on the Strand as
it failed on Broadway.

Dixey is a native of Boston, where he
was born in 1859, and his real name is
Dixon. He was the fore, not the hind,
legs of the heifer in "Evangeline." Just
previous to his appearance in "Oliver
Goldsmith" the Liebler essayed to star
him in a dramatization of S. Veit
Mitchell's "Adventures of Francols," but
the play did not live to reach New
York.

In "Little Mary" he is the Earl of
Carlton, who pairs off with the Stormy
Petrel (which the play was originally
to have been called), this being the pub-
lic's nickname for the young woman
who makes a tistery of her cures.
Ocell, his son, is done by Fritz Williams,
fresh from "A Japanese Nightingale."

Another Lyceum Stand-By.

Fritz Williams was one of the stand-
bys of the old Lyceum stock. Like
Dixey, he was born in the Hub, and his
first speaking part was played at the
age of eleven in the original juvenile
"Pinafore" company at the Museum.
When he appeared as Sir Joseph Porter,
later he acted with Edwin Booth in

"Don Caesar de Bazan," and also ap-
peared with Lester Wallack. A few sea-
sons back he was handicapped by being
cast in the French farces Mr. Frohman
insisted on importing from Paris, but
last winter he came into his own again
with a boy's part at the Empire in "The
Unfortunate."

Previous to that he was for two years
a member of the all-star stock company
at Weber & Fields, where he became a
great favorite. He went there on the
shortest possible notice to oblige the
management by taking Charles Ross'
place in the burlesque on "A Royal
Family."

A young lord in "Little Mary" is very
neatly played by Walter Eddinger, Jr.,
who, for some mysterious reason, has
evolved into this cognomen from Wal-
lace Eddinger, by which he was known
a few weeks ago in "Soldiers of For-
tune." In the latter play he began as
the Ensign, who appears only in the
last act, and finished the next season as
Captain Stuart, created by Guy Bates
Post.

Can it be possible that young Edding-
er is seeking to cover the fact that he
once wore long golden curls as one of
the many Little Lord Fauntleroy's?

Lady Millicent, the invalid daughter
on whom the Stormy Petrel works her
mysterious cure, is enacted by Marie
Doro, promoted out of "The Girl from
Kay's," and who last winter was one of
Mr. Robson's two daughters in "The
Billionaire."

A unique entertainment can now be
seen at the Manhattan Theater, where
Mr. Fiske has just established \$1.50 as
the topnotch price for seats. And I must
say I enjoyed the performance, even
though it partook of the form of the
dramatized novel, of which I have
grown so heartily tired.

I call it unique entertainment because
"The Virginian" can scarcely be termed
a play, being rather a series of epis-
odes. But in some way they rivet your
attention, and while one of them may
not naturally lead up to the next, you
are still anxious to learn what that next
will be, having been so pleased with
those that have gone before.

A Theatrical "Dark Horse."

It is easy to tear such an offering to
tatters from a critical standpoint. The
play has indeed been dubbed a drama-

tized hen, but then in a season like the
present one that manager may count
himself lucky who holds an audience in
their seats by any legitimate means. Of
course, Dustin Farnum, the theatrical
"dark horse," who fills the name part,
is responsible for much of the favor with
which the piece has been received.

He is big, brimming over with good
nature and with a Southern accent not
made up wholly of "I reckon" and sup-
pressed "r's," which seems to be the
usual way of conveying over the foot-
lights the fact that the speaker is from
the lower side of Mason and Dixon's
line. His intonation is simply natural,
not in the least exaggerated, and yet the
fellow had never done a dialect part
before and is himself from Massachu-
setts.

He is now twenty-eight and has been
on the stage some seven years. His first
appearance was with Margaret Mather
in Shakespeare, and he played for a
time with Chauncey Olcott. His brother
William was the second Ben Hur, suc-
ceeding Edward Morgan in the part.

Speaking of Chauncey Olcott, I saw
his play, "Terence," in Philadelphia, at
the Walnut, one of the oldest theaters
in the country, this being named on the
program as its ninety-sixth season. As
to "Terence," well, that is another of
the dramatized books, and as in strong
contrast as possible to "The Virginian."

In the Olcott play everything runs in
the groove of tradition. It is to be
admitted that for the Olcott clientele a
departure from these grooves would be
a fatal misstep, so, as Abraham Lincoln
was wont to remark, "For those that
like that sort of thing, 'Terence' is just
the sort thing they will like."

Chauncey Olcott is a recruit from the
miscellaneous semicircle, where he used to
sit in black face and sing ballads. He
was pressed into service to take the
place of the late W. J. Scanlan, the
adored Irish comedian of Fourteenth
Street in the latter eighties. Olcott's
first big hit was in "Mavourneen."

"Terence" is plentifully supplied with
villains, there being no fewer than
three. The most important is the law-
yer, enacted by Augustus Cook, who
made an admirable Napoleon for Kath-
ryn Kidder's "Madame Sans Gene."

Later he was in "The Circus Girl," at
Daly's.

Adelaide Keim, Olcott's leading woman,
started her career at the Lyceum as
Miss Brewster in "Trelawny of the
Wells." The next year she was in that
comedy from the German which made
such a hit at Wallack's, "At the White
Horse Tavern," and also in its sequel,
"Twenty Years Later," which would not
go at all.

I cannot refrain from mentioning in
connection with "Terence," which is on
view here at the New York Theater,
the mighty improvements Klaw & Er-
lander have wrought in that house.
They have actually succeeded in mak-
ing it look cozy, something that seemed
impossible to do with the barn of a place
as it was originally, with its multitudi-
nous stucco-work boxes, reminding one
for all the world of so many pigeon
cotes.

The simplicity, too, of the scheme of
decoration in the refurbished auditor-
ium is exceedingly restful after a sur-
feit of the new art business in the
other house, the New Amsterdam.